

STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE DANIEL S. GOLDIN  
ADMINISTRATOR  
NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION  
SEPTEMBER 25, 1997  
10:00 A.M. EDT

Ever since becoming NASA Administrator in 1992, I have worked hard to make the agency operate faster, better and cheaper. The dedicated people at NASA have accomplished that, but never at the expense of our highest priority: safety. Today, I continue that commitment.

It is only after carefully reviewing of the facts, thoroughly assessing the input from independent evaluators, and measuring the weighty responsibility NASA bears with putting any American in space, that I approve the decision to continue the next phase of the Shuttle/Mir mission.

Tonight, the Shuttle Atlantis will launch, sending David Wolf to replace Michael Foale and to continue an American presence on Mir.

This is a decision that all of us at NASA do not take lightly. We share our fellow Americans' deep concern for our astronauts' safety. And we have heard the calls of some who say it is time to abandon the Mir. We at NASA, especially Michael Foale, are deeply touched by this outpouring of emotion. However, we know the decision to continue our joint participation aboard Mir should not be based on emotions or politics. It should not be based on fear. Our decision should be based, and is based, on a scientific and technical assessment of the mission's safety and the agency's ability to gain additional experience and knowledge that cannot be gained elsewhere.

In a status report from Michael Foale, he urged our continued participation aboard space station Mir and that David Wolf join the Mir crew. I have also spoken to David Wolf. I asked him if he is confident in NASA's safety review and if he thought we should go ahead. He answered with a resounding "yes."

As the person who bears the ultimate responsibility for America's space program, I have been diligently reviewing the independent and internal safety assessments. I have concluded Shuttle/Mir has a thorough review process that ensures continued American participation aboard Mir does not put human life in unnecessary peril. Briefly, I would like to share that review process with you.

The first step in the review consists of a comprehensive, all-systems analysis to conduct the mission safely and successfully. Each major system and component critical to the crew's safety and the mission's success is reviewed and

determined to be ready for flight. This review is led by Shuttle/Mir Program Manager Frank Culbertson. This step concluded last week with the final Shuttle Flight Readiness Review, a separate comprehensive review of all aspects of Shuttle mission readiness. This review resulted in unanimous approval to proceed with launch of Shuttle Atlantis to Mir.

The second step is an internal review led by Fred Gregory, NASA's Associate Administrator for Safety and Mission Assurance. At the flight readiness review Col. Gregory gave his certification of Shuttle-Mir flight safety.

The third step is an external independent review by a NASA Advisory Council Task Force, known as the Stafford Commission. This step, as with the two previous, is part of each and every Shuttle/Mir mission review. Led by former Gemini and Apollo astronaut Lt. Gen. Thomas Stafford, the review includes eight other non-NASA members. To address recent Mir problems, General Stafford took the unprecedented step of asking Dr. Ralph Jacobson, President Emeritus of The Charles Draper Laboratories, to head a smaller team and take a fresh look at this particular mission's safety and operational readiness.

Yesterday, I was briefed on General Stafford's and Dr. Jacobson's reviews of Mir systems. They concluded "not only is the Mir station deemed to be a satisfactory life support platform at this time, but it is anticipated that significant operational and scientific experience is still to be gained through continued joint operations."

Lastly, when the Inspector General raised concerns about the NASA safety review, we added even another step to our Shuttle/Mir review process. I asked Thomas Young, member of the National Academy of Engineering, to lead yet another independent group of some of our country's best to look at the IG's report. This group set out to find if there was integrity to NASA's safety review process and to ensure no stone was left unturned. Mr. Young stated in his report to me, "The safety issues cited in the Inspector General's report have been analyzed and assessed by the NASA Phase I team. NASA has an adequate safety assessment process that is complete and thorough. We found no safety concerns that were not being considered by the NASA safety assessment process."

In light of increased scrutiny and heightened emotion, I can assure you, this intensely rigorous internal and external review of the Shuttle/Mir analyzed -- thoroughly -- risk, readiness, and foremost, safety.

I will not trivialize the risks involved in human space exploration. Like all Americans, I know every time an astronaut travels to space there is risk. When we build the International Space Station we will encounter similar problems and there will be danger.

But NASA is ready.

We are ready because the reviews assure us. But we're also ready because it's the right thing to do. Americans press forward.

We overcome the unexpected.  
We discover the unknown.  
That has been our history.  
That's America's destiny.

I love this country very much, and I feel privileged to serve with so many dedicated, talented and courageous individuals. Today, more than ever, I am proud of everyone at NASA for their commitment to America's future and for their service to humankind.

And to David Wolf , Michael Foale and the rest of the Shuttle Atlantis crew . . . Godspeed.  
We'll see you when you get home.

-- end --